WordStar Tutorial by Mike Petrie

This short document is designed to give you a brief introduction to WordStar and its command set.

What is WordStar?

The question should probably be “What was WordStar?” as the program is no longer in production. If you are less than 30 years old, or are new to computers, you may never have heard of WordStar before. If you have heard about it you’ve probably heard that it was difficult to learn and use – a common fallacy. WordStar is a word processor that predates both of today's most commonly known word processors - WordPerfect, and Word.

What makes WordStar special?

WordStar was *the* word processor that bridged the gap between typewriters, specialist publishing computers, and general-purpose computers. The program was first written to run on the general-purpose operating system of the day which was called CP/M (Control Program /for Microprocessors). CP/M was developed in 1973 and became available for a wide range of computers. It was this availability, along with programs like WordStar and Lotus 1-2-3 that made the new *micro-computers* so indispensable.

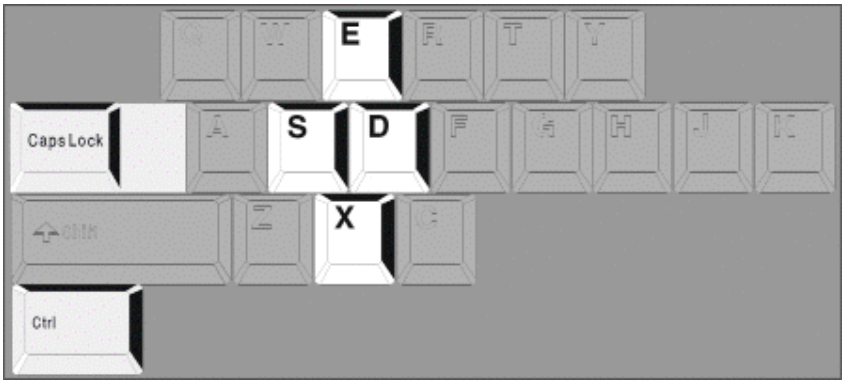
WordStar was designed to work with any general-purpose computer. This means that there were no special keys available for functions a word processor operator might need – to make text bold, or underlined, for example. At that time there were no mice or cursor arrow keys either, nor were window style interfaces available.

To overcome these system limitations WordStar used a set of keyboard commands to do everything a word processor operator would need. All of these commands used the Control key that is still in use on PC keyboards today, albeit in a different position. It was remembering these commands that gave WordStar the reputation for being difficult to learn. However, if you learnt the logic behind the commands they generally became intuitive. It was discovering this logic that tended to be the problem with learning WordStar. This short tutorial will hopefully help to show that it isn’t that difficult.

Basic navigation

Make sure you have a file open – this one will do. Save a copy, and work with that.

This first lesson will teach you the basic navigation keys – to move the cursor (insertion point) up, down, left, and right by one position. These moves use what is often termed the *WordStar Diamond*. The keys you need are shown below.



You only need four of the six keys illustrated. If you don’t have Microsoft’s Keyremap installed and set to swap the **Caps Lock** and **Control** keys, you’ll use the **Control** key itself. Otherwise you’ll use the key marked as **Caps Lock**. Ideally you’ll have the Key Remap utility installed and use the **Caps Lock** key as the **Control** key - putting it back where it used to be on all computers before IBM moved it when it introduced the AT PC.

Note the position of the letters **E**, **S**, **D**, and **X**. These keys represent Up, Left, Right, and Down respectively.

Hold down the **Control** key and at the same time press each of the navigation keys in turn to move the cursor by one place in each direction. If you've used the Key Remap utility to swap the **Caps Lock** and **Control** keys, and you can touch type, you'll notice that you can now move around the document without your hands leaving the home row. This feature has sometimes lead to WordStar being called the *touch typist’s* or *writer’s* word processor.

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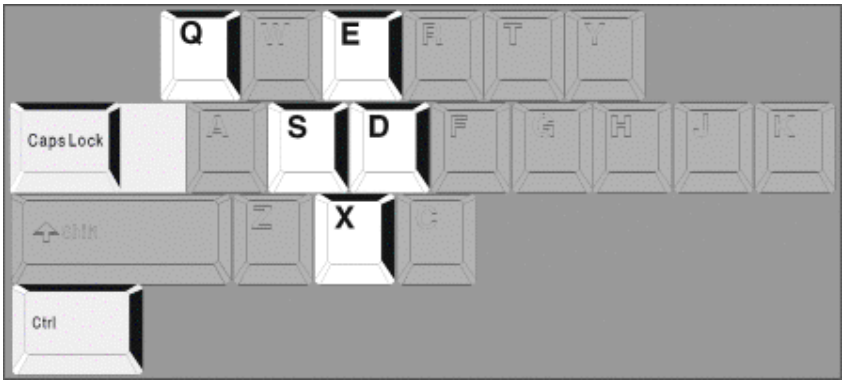
Larger moves - The Quick Key

You should now be able to move left and right by one character, and up and down by one line. This is fine for small moves, but what if you need to move further? For this, we add one more key – the **Quick Key**, made from the letter **Q**.



The four 'diamond' letters retain their previous functions, but with the **Quick Key** added they move further in their respective directions. To use the **Quick Key** hold down the **Control** key and at the same time press **Q**. You can now let go of both keys before pressing the direction you want to move in. This is written as **^QS** to move Quickly to the Left – it takes you to the start of the line. **^QD** does as you might expect and takes you to the end of the line. **^QE** moves you to the top left of the screen, and **^QX** to the bottom right of the screen. Note that **^QE** and **^QX** don't go to the very top or bottom line, they may move the cursor a couple of lines in from that. This is because Word doesn't give the same amount of movement for different screen resolutions. The couple of lines in is to ensure that Word doesn't put the cursor just off the screen edge.

Practise using these Quick Key combinations along with the basic navigation keys. Try going five lines from the top of the screen - **^QE ^X** (repeating **^X** as necessary to get to the correct line). In Windows this equates to **ALT+CTRL+Page Up**, **Down Arrow**, **Down Arrow**, **Down Arrow**, **Down Arrow**, **Down Arrow** (that is, hold down the **ALT**, the **CTRL**, and the **Page Up** key - all at the same time!). You could alternatively grab for the mouse, aim the pointer, and click within the line.

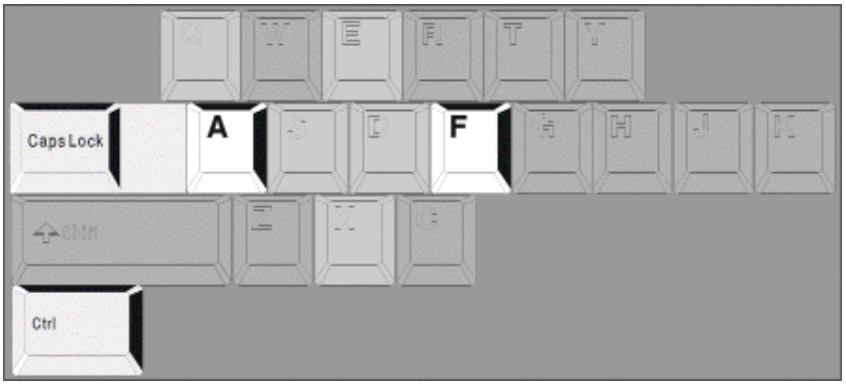
Why is learning the WordStar commands so useful? It's because you can navigate around your document using just two fingers of your left hand. All other word processors require you to use both hands - sometimes at the same time, or to reach for the mouse. The one handed, in the typing position, method of navigation that WordStar allows is especially important if you can type properly. If you can type, having the **Control** and **Caps Lock** keys swapped is even more desirable. You can do all document navigation without moving your hands away from the home typing position - no more reaching for the other modifier or special keys (**SHIFT**, **ALT**, **ESC**, **HOME**, **F5**, etc.), or for the mouse, all of which slows you down.

"But I'm not a typist!" Nor am I, but if you persevere you'll soon be able to do these commands with your little finger and one other of your left hand whilst your right hand is ready to type again with one, or if like me, two fingers. You've already seen that the WordStar **^QE** and **^QX** commands are easier probably to remember, and certainly to carry out, than the Windows standard **ALT+CTRL+Page Up** and **ALT+CTRL+Page Down** alternatives which need two modifiers and both hands. This may be reason enough to not only use the WordStar commands, but also to have another go at learning to type properly.

Other moves

You can now get to the extremes of the screen – left, right, top left, and bottom right. You'll also be able to move by a single line up and down and character left and right. This is all very useful, but you'll often want to move to places on a line other than the start or end. To do this, we add two more keys that will allow you to move forwards and backwards by a word. These keys are the letters **A** and **F**.

You'll notice that the new keys **A** and **F** are to either side of the left and right movement keys already learnt – **S** and **D**. That means that they move by an amount more than the character Left and Right keys do, but less than the **Quick Key** moves. **^A** moves the cursor either to the start of the current word, or to the start of the word to the left (if the cursor isn't within a word). The **^F** key goes to the start of the next word. The **F** for **F**orward is pure coincidence, but may help you to remember these two keys.

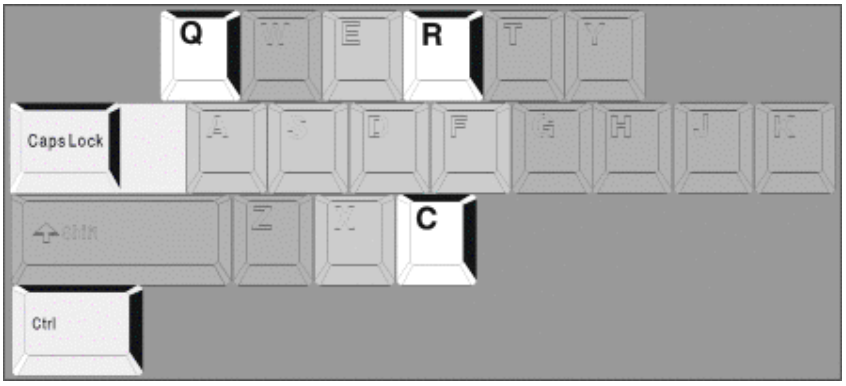


To practise, try going to the start of the third word on the fourth line from the bottom of the screen. You'd use **^QX ^QS ^E** (repeat **^E** if necessary to get to the line), **^QF ^QF**. This reads as End of Screen, Start of Line, Line Up - as required, Word Forwards, Word Forwards. In Word the commands would be **ALT+CTRL+Page Down**, **HOME**, **Up Arrow, Up Arrow, Up Arrow**, **^Right Arrow**, **^Right Arrow** – or, the mouse. With a little practise, the WordStar way of navigating is much easier to remember and to carry out.

Try putting all of the keys used so far to use before moving on.

Moving through the document

You can already move as far as possible left and right using **^QS** and **^QD**. But vertical movements aren't restricted to the top and bottom of the screen. What if your document is longer than the screen can show? You could use **^QX** to get to the bottom and then **^X** to move further down a line at a time but it wouldn't be very efficient. WordStar gets around this by using **Page Up** and **Page Down** commands – much like the keys with the same names on most modern PC keyboards. These extra keys can't use the up and down keys (**E** and **X**), as the left and right (**S** and **D**) keys do for horizontal moves, because **E** and **X** already take you to the top and bottom of the screen. WordStar therefore needs to use two more keys. These sit alongside the Up and Down a Line keys and are the letters **R** and **C**.



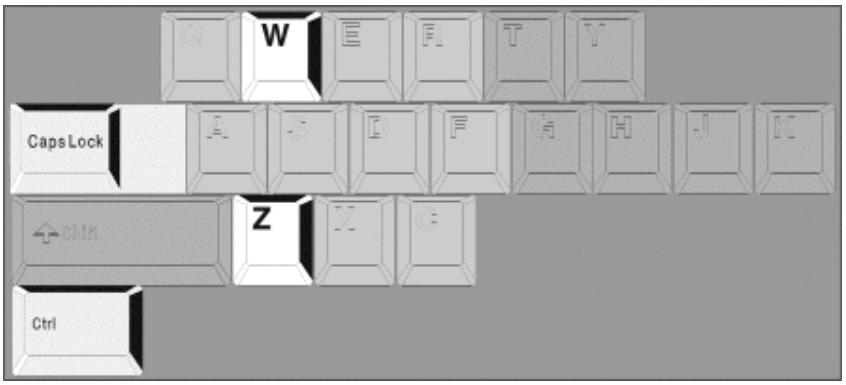
^R scrolls you up through your document one page at a time – it moves in a *Reverse* direction. **^C** scrolls you down a page at a time, *Continuing* through the document. Try these out now.

The illustration above also shows the **Quick Key**. This is used if you want to scroll Quickly Up to the Top of the document – **^QR**, or Down through the document to the end – **^QC**.

Try putting all of these commands together. You now know the main WordStar navigation keys and should be able to move quickly around the document.

Screen scrolling commands

WordStar allows for several other ways to move around your documents. It allows a repeat scroll, a bit like the new wheel mice do in Windows programs. It also allows the screen to scroll up and down by a line at a time – rather than moving the cursor up and down. The evaluation version of the add-in only suports the latter, and in this the cursor moves up and down with the text until it reaches either the top or bottom of the screen. In the real WordStar the cursor maintains its position in the window. It's probably easier to try this than to explain it. To try it out you need two more keys – also alongside the Line Up and Line Down keys, as shown below.

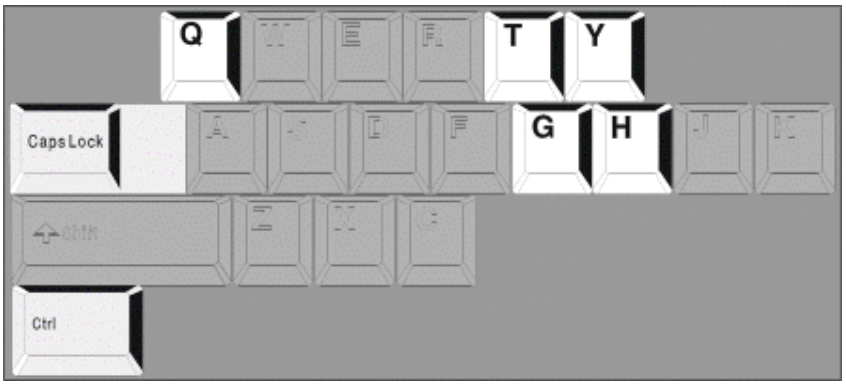


^W scrolls the window, on the document, up – the document moves down! **^Z** scrolls the window down so the document moves up through the viewing window. Seems backwards, but it makes sense when you think about it.

That completes the WordStar basic navigation commands. Practise these until you're happy with them. Then continue with some of the editing commands.

Basic editing commands - Deleting text

Now that you can move around the document you may want to make changes to it. This section will introduce you to the WordStar deleting commands. The four new keys needed for these functions are illustrated below.



The deletion keys are to the right of the cursor movement keys learnt earlier. Five commands are available, four using just the control key plus letter, and the fifth using the **Quick Key** plus a letter. The delete options from the keyboard are the equivalents of the dedicated **Backspace** and **Del** keys plus Delete Word, Delete line, and Delete to End of Line commands.

First, open your practise document, move to a suitable place in the middle of a line, and type **^G**. This is the Delete Right command and equates to the **Del** key – it deletes the character to the right of the cursor, sucking the rest of the text on the line towards the cursor.

Now try **^H**. This is the **Backspace** key, which not only backspaces but deletes as well. These two commands, **^G** and **^H** are now provided by special keys on PC keyboards, but again, by using the WordStar commands your hands can stay on the keyboard where your work is.

The remaining keys provide more advanced delete functions. From a position somewhere near the middle of a line type **^T**. The word to the right is deleted, or, if the cursor was within a word, the remainder of the word to the right is deleted. Now type **^Y** (*for line*), the whole line is deleted. The final command adds the **Quick Key** again and deletes to the end of the current line - **^QY**.

WordStar also has Delete to Start of the Line, and Delete to Specified Character commands. These aren't provided in the evaluation version of the add-in.

More navigation commands - Bookmarks

The evaluation version of the add-in only gives one group of WordStar's block commands – the Block Marker (Bookmark) command. This command allows you to place a temporary marker in the text and to jump back to it sometime later. This enables you to mark your position, go off and change some other part of the document, and then return to where you started.

To place a marker type **^K** plus a number between one and three – you can place three distinct markers (WordStar and the registered versions of the add-in allow 10 markers to be specified). **^K** denotes a bloc**K** command like **^Q** precedes all **Quick** commands in WordStar.

Now, use some of the navigation commands to move away from the marker you just placed. Then type **^Q** followed by the number you chose above to jump back to the previous place in the document. *Go Quickly* to marker number *x*.

Summary

You have just learnt the basic WordStar navigation and editing commands. You will find support for these commands in many programs other than WordStar. It may surprise you how many key combinations have been covered, and how many keys have been used. Both of these are shown below starting with the keyboard keys used - note that **J** is shown but hasn't been used, **^J** starts Word's help.

Commands summary

The 23 commands covered in the tutorial are:

Command	*WordStar*	*Word equivalent*
Word Left	**^A**	**^Left Arrow**
Page Down	**^C**	**Page Down**
Character Right	**^D**	**Right Arrow**
Line Up	**^E**	**Up Arrow**
Word Right	**^F**	**^Right Arrow**
Delete Right	**^G**	**Del**
Backspace Delete	**^H**	**Backspace**
Insert Bookmark	**^K1~3**	**ALT+I,K** – Type **name**, Click **Add**
Go To Bookmark	**^Q1~3**	**^G** – Click **Bookmarks**, Type **name**, Click **GoTo**
End of Document	**^QC**	**^End**
End of Line	**^QD**	**End**
Start of Window (Top Left)	**^QE**	**ALT+^Page Up**
Start of Document	**^QR**	**^Home**
Start of Line	**^QS**	**Home**
End of Window (Bottom Right)	**^QX**	**ALT+^Page Down**
Delete to End of Line	**^QY**	–
Page Up	**^R**	**Page Up**
Character Left	**^S**	**Left Arrow**
Delete Word	**^T**	**^Del**
Scroll Window Up	**^W**	–
Line Down	**^X**	**Down Arrow**
Delete Line	**^Y**	–
Scroll Window Down	**^Z**	–

What other commands are in WordStar?

WordStar, and the **WordSTAR Add-In**, have many more editing keys available, along with a few more navigation keys as mentioned above. Some of the most important of these are mentioned below:

Perhaps the most important set of additional commands are the 'Block Commands'. These allow you to mark a block of text - like you would do with the mouse in a Windows word processor. However, in Windows, once you move the cursor your block gets 'unmarked'. In WordStar a marked block stays marked until you specifically unmark it. So what's the benefit of this? It means that you can mark a block of text you want to copy or move to another part of the document, go off and do some typing, move to the new location however you want and then do the copy or move. The block commands were briefly mentioned under the heading "*More navigation commands - Bookmarks*." Here is the logic behind the Block commands:

- **^KB** Block Beginning. "Why **^K**?" **^B** had already been taken so all block functions took the unused **K** syllable.
- **^KK** Block End. "Why **K** and not **E**?" **E** was used for File r**E**name. But as **B** is the beginning of **B**lock, and **K** is the end of the word block, then using **B** and **K** to delimit a **B**loc**k** of text has some logic to it.
- **^KC** **C**opies a marked block to the current cursor location.
- **^KV** mo**V**es a marked block to the current position.
- **^KY** deletes the block - remember that **Y** was used for line deletes as well.
- **^KW** **W**rites the block to a file - either new, or appends to the end of an existing one.
- **^KR** **R**eads the contents of a file and places them at the current cursor position.

The Block commands also cover other file operations: **^K** - **S**ave, r**E**name, **P**rint, c**O**py. The block in these cases comprises the entire document.

There are also formatting commands:

- **^PB** **P**rint **B**old. "Why print?" Because before graphical '*WYSIWYG*' interfaces became generally available with Windows 3.0 you couldn't show the effect of bold on the screen, only in print.
- **^PY** Italic - **I** was used for setting tabs - the letter representing the tab ruler's markers.
- **^PS** under**S**core, or underline.

There are commands for searching through the document either as a Go To, Find, or Find and Replace. Others allow you to change the case of letters, words, or sentences; make text super or subscript; count the number of words or paragraphs either within a specific area or for the whole document.

Many of these commands, and others not mentioned, are available in the registered version of the **WordSTAR Add-In**.